

Critical study of the erroneous attribution of the book *Shajarat al-Kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī instead of to Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī

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Abstract:

Shajarat al-kawn, (The Tree of the Universe) is a beautiful short treatise on Islamic mysticism that describes the universe and its true origin, the role and place of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), and his central place in the sacred presence. According to some manuscripts from the 19th century (13th century A.H.), it is attributed to Muhyī d-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638 A.H./1240). All scholars endorsed this attribution and it was conveyed via fifteen commercial book-prints.

The study by Arabic scholars and orientalists and some translations led to doubt about the origin of the treatise. This was the start of an adventure because what was supposed to be known up to now would become questioned.

During my research, I scrutinised two different unknown manuscripts of *Shajarat al-kawn*. There was also a third, very old, manuscript written in the year 835 A.H. All these manuscripts refer to the author and poet 'Izzu d-Dīn 'Abd as-Salām Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī (d.678 A.H./1280) and not to Ibn 'Arabī.

Furthermore, I found some proof in the biographical history and the style of writing that pointed to Ibn Ghānim as the author. I came to the conclusion that the work was actually written by 'Izzu d-Dīn 'Abd as-Salām Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ghānim. From the results of my research, we can conclude that the book *Shajarat al-kawn* is by Ibn Ghānim and not Ibn 'Arabī.²

This study consists of two parts. The first is: How did this treatise, *Shajarat al-kawn*, come to be universally attributed to Ibn 'Arabī? The second is a discussion of the doubts that the treatise *Shajarat al-kawn* was written by Ibn 'Arabī. This discussion consists of four topics: 1) the problem of copying manuscripts attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, 2) the catalogues that attributed *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī, 3) comparison of the text of the *Shajarat al-kawn* in both content and format with Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Ghānim, and 4) the studies and translations of the *Shajarat al-kawn* attributed to Ibn 'Arabī."

How Did the Treatise *Shajarat al-kawn* Come to be Universally-Attributed to Ibn 'Arabī?

The problems experts face concern not so much the text as attributing the

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² I came to these conclusions over eighteen years ago, during my Master's studies in 1989-1990 at the Sorbonne and after that in the French Institute of Arab Studies of Damascus (IFEAD), in 1991.

work to the right author. The problem of the text is of secondary importance, in spite of the fact that there has never been a critical edition. The treatise has been published over fifteen times. The first time was in 1290 A.H. (1873), and everyone agreed that the work was by Ibn 'Arabī.

Scholars, orientalist, and translators of *Shajarat al-kawn* did not show any doubts about the authenticity of the attribution of this treatise. They did not investigate if *Shajarat al-kawn* was composed by someone else. They kept printing commercial editions of the work but never returned to the old and authentic manuscripts, being certain that the work came from Ibn 'Arabī. There are different steps to determining the real author of the work. When I studied the biographical history, I began to have doubts. The thought occurred to me that perhaps the work was written by Ibn Ghānim and not by Ibn 'Arabī.

During my research I realised I had to scrutinise all the catalogues of old Arabic manuscripts. I found a manuscript in the National Library of Paris, number 5291, which was dated 835 A .H. (ff. 275a-287b).³ This catalogue referred to Ibn Ghānim and not to Ibn 'Arabī. It was a manuscript called *Shajarat al-kawn*, and on the title page was a reference to Ibn Ghānim where it says: "*kitāb fīhi shajarat al-kawn li ash-sheikh as-sālih al-wari' az-zāhid al-muḥaqqiq sheikh aṭ-ṭarīqa wa ma'din ul-ḥaqīqa 'Izzi 'd-Dīn 'Abd as-Salām Ibn ash-sheikh Aḥmad Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī radya llāhu 'anhu wa arḍāh wa ja'ala al-jannata mathwāh. Āmīn*"

On the last page (f.287b) I found a date: "15 rabī' al-awwal 835 A.H." where it says: "tamma kitāb ash-shajarat biḥamdi l-llahi ta'ālā wa'awnihi, 'alā yadi kātibihī aḍ'afi 'ibādihi wa aḥwajihim ilā raḥmatihī 'Alī ibn Muhammad ibn 'Umar ma'rūf bibni al-'lqamī ash-shafī'ī ... bitārīkh khāmis 'aḥar, shahr rabī' al-awwal, yawma larbi'ā sanata khamsin wa thalāthīn wa thamānīmiyah"

So I concluded that Ibn 'Arabī might not be the author of *Shajarat al-kawn*. However, this manuscript alone was not enough to confirm this. Many great scholars in the east, such as Hussein Nasr in Iran, Mustafa Hilmi⁴ in Egypt, Arthur Jeffrey⁵ in America, and Maurice Gloton⁶ in France, dealt with studies on *Shajarat*

³ The story of this Parisian manuscript dates back to the end of the 19th century, as stated by the French colonialists of the Segou Kingdom of West Africa. It was included among the priceless collection of Arabic manuscripts that belonged to Ahmed Segou's library, known as Ahmed al-kabir al-Madani Ibn al-Hajj Omar Segou, prince of that Islamic State in the second half of the 19th century. It was founded by his father, al-Hajj Omar, the president of the Tijani Brotherhood and the leader of *jihad* against the Bambara groups between 1852 and 1864. Segou was colonised, by the French in 1890, under the leadership of Arsenal, who transferred four sets of priceless manuscripts from Segou to Paris. At the beginning of the 20th century these manuscripts were placed in the National Library in Paris for researchers. For details of these manuscripts see Inventaire de la bibliothèque Umarienne de Ségu (Conservée à la Bibliothèque de Paris), by Nouredine Ghali et Sidi Mohamed Mahibou, with collaboration by L. Brenner ed. C.N.R.S. (Paris: 1985).

⁴ Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī, "Kunūz fī Rumūz," in *al-kitāb al-tiḍkāri Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī fī al-ḍikrā al-tāmina li Milādih* (Cairo, 1969), pp. 35-66.

⁵ Arthur Jeffrey, "Ibn 'Arabī's Shajarat al-kawn," *Studia Islamica* X-XI (1959-1960). This English translation was reprinted in 1980 in Lahore (Publisher: Aziz).

⁶ Maurice Gloton, *L'arbre du monde* (Paris: Deux Océan, 1982).

al-kawn. They translated it with no doubt or suspicion that the work was not by Ibn 'Arabī. Arthur Jeffrey and Maurice Gloton compared the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī in this work with his ideas in other works to clarify obscure passages in *Shajarat al-kawn*. The same was done by Claude Audebert when she studied *Shajarat al-kawn*.⁷

Osman Yahya⁸ was convinced that the treatise was to be ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī. This is what we also find in the catalogues of many Arabic manuscripts. In addition, there are more than ten copies that refer to Ibn 'Arabī as the author. Two are at Al-Azhar in Egypt, and the others in Damascus and in Iraq. The other copies are in the Sulaymāniya library in Istanbul and other libraries in Turkey.

We encountered, accordingly, widely divergent problems. We must discuss these and solve them in order to be able to attribute the book to the true author. The following should be taken into consideration. First, many manuscripts refer to Ibn 'Arabī; and because of that we had to find copies that refer to Ibn Ghānim as the author, so they could be compared. Second, we had to consult the catalogues of the well-known manuscripts that refer to Ibn 'Arabī as the author, especially Osman Yahya's *Histoire et Classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (RG), C. Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (GAL), *Dhayl kashf az-zunūn* by al-Baghdādī, and the *Fihrist al-Kutubkhāna al-khiddiwiya* by al-Biblawī and al-Mihī. The information has to be handled in a critical scientific way, because there is no real evidence about the author of the book. Third, the book itself had to be studied very thoroughly, the style viewed in terms of art, and the way of thinking that is described in the book taken into account, so that we can make a comparison of the two authors and attribute the book to one of them. Fourth, the research on the work *Shajarat al-kawn* that has been undertaken had to be examined as well as the discussion that results from the three points mentioned above.

Discussion of the Doubts about the Authorship of Ibn Arabī

Discussion of the Manuscripts that Refer to Ibn Arabī

After researching the historical data, we found that these manuscripts are not dated, which is normal with manuscripts of a later period. There are only three copies that are dated. These three are not very old; they were copied in the last quarter of the 13th century A.H, in 1270, 1273, and 1292 A.H. exactly. After that period mechanical printing started. The later copies have a low historical documentary value.

The latter manuscripts became of less value once I had obtained more infor-

⁷ Claude Audebert adopted the Cairo edition 1360/1941 in her article "Tarīqat Tafkīr ibn 'Arabī fī risālat *Shajarat al-kawn*," *al-mu'allim al-'Arabī* 20/4 (1967), as did Arthur Jeffrey in his translation of *Shajarat al-kawn*, whereas Maurice Gloton adopted the 1966 and 1968 editions.

⁸ Osman Yahya, *Histoire et Classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Damascus, 1964), RG 666. This was a Ph.D. dissertation in 1958 at the Sorbonne in Paris.

mation from subsequent research. A. I discovered a manuscript from Paris numbered 5291 that claimed to have been written by Ibn Ghānim. My research began with this manuscript. It has a high value because it is very old. In fact, it is the oldest one I found, namely from the year 835 A.H. This copy is the most correct and complete of those considered.⁹

B. During my research in the library at Damascus I found a manuscript called the *Shajarat al-īmān*, claiming to have been written by Ibn Ghānim, bearing the number 5253. After comparing this manuscript with the one in Paris, I found that they were identical.

If we look at the catalogue of Riyād al-Mālih,¹⁰ which contains all the Sufi manuscripts in the az-zāhiriya library in Damascus, we cannot come to this conclusion because he was obviously not aware of this fact. It is possible that his catalogue is not based on a profound study of the manuscripts and that librarians only studied the indices of the manuscripts and some pages but not the whole manuscript. The manuscript consists of two books with the same title: *Shajarat al-īmān*; there is no difference between them. The first part of the manuscript is called *Shajarat al-kawn*, the second part "Explanation of the Spiritual Situation of the Prophet's Companions: *Sharhu hāl as-Sahāba*." The author of this book is given as Ibn Ghānim.

I believe that Ibn Ghānim made one book of the two books mentioned above in some copies, since these books are so much alike. The first book gives an explanation of the spiritual situation of the prophet. This is the tree. The other book, which explains the spiritual situation of the *Sahāba*, talks about the branches of the tree.

The vision of the tree is stronger as an image in Ibn Ghānim than it is in Ibn 'Arabī. It gives an explanation of the spiritual situation of the *Sahāba*, and this manuscript is also in Paris.¹¹ The book talks about the tree of prophets and the last prophet of this tree is Muhammad (peace be upon him). When the rain falls upon a tree, the tree starts to tremble and after a while twigs and leaves grow out of its branches. And when the tree is completely mature and is completely green, someone shouts with the tongue of fate and says: "O tree, we needed you only for something important that is inside you." That is the essence of prophethood, the Muhammadi branch, and the Aḥmadi secret. If this essence of prophethood is squeezed out then the twigs, the essences of the ten *Sahāba*, will grow from the branches.

Ibn Ghānim says in his book *Ṭuruqu l-wasā'il wa tamalluqu s-sā'il* (The Different Ways of the Beggars of Allah): "O, those who have the love of Allah, when the grain of love falls on the earth where the healthy hearts are, then the roots will

⁹ Some pages of this copy are partly burned but were replaced from another copy.

¹⁰ Riyād al-Mālih, *Fihris Maḳūḳāt Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya*, pt. 2 (Damascus: Publisher, Year), p. 83.

¹¹ Arab Manuscript in Paris, nr. 2035, fol. 2a.

grow firm in the depth of justice and purity. All the old habits will be washed out. Then the souls will be hung out on the branches, with love printed on them. Every morning they will be softened by dawn because of asking forgiveness at the night-prayer.”¹²

The az-Zāhiriya manuscript *Shajarat al-īmān* is not dated, but there are two things that support the documentary value of this manuscript. First, it is a reviewed manuscript and bears the name of Muhammad Ibn Abd ar-Raḥmān Juḥa, 1243 A.H. prior to the date of the copies attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī. Second, we noted different kind of problems with the names of manuscripts and copies of Ibn Ghānim: sometimes we find “‘Izz ud-Dīn Ibn Abd as-salām Ibn Ghānim” and sometimes “‘Abd as-salām Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī,” etc. However, on the other hand, we find versions containing *Shajarat al-kawn* that are in perfect shape as far as the full name is concerned. This indicates that the copyist is sure of a fixed attribution to Ibn Ghānim. On the first page of the az-Zāhiriya manuscript (5253: fol. 136a-160b), we find the following:¹³ “*kitāb shajarat al-īmān, ta’līf sh-Sheikh al-imām al-‘ālim al-‘allāma sh-Sheikh ‘Izzī d-Dīn abd as-salām Ibn Ahmad Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī qaddas Allah sirrahu wa rūḥahu wa nawwara dariḥahu wa nafa’anā bihi wal-muslimīna āmīn.*”¹⁴

C. After closely reading some of Ibn Ghānim’s manuscripts at the National Library in Paris, I stumbled on part of another manuscript constituting about one quarter of the treatise, *Shajarat al-kawn* at No. 3522 (f.f.: 30b-36b) and bearing the title: *ishāra fī mi’rāj an-nabī salla llāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam* (=reference to the Ascent of the Prophet, peace be upon him) attributed to Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī. We do not understand how this part *Shajarat al-kawn* came to be present in this manuscript of Ibn Ghānim’s famous work, *kashf al-asrār ‘an ḥikam t-tuyūr wa l-azhār*. We do not know why there is this confusion in that manuscript, which does not distinguish between duplicate titles, and incomplete parts of the work *Shajarat al-kawn*, and appended a notification and sermons by Ibn Ghānim unrelated to the work. In addition, we do not know why the dates of the copies were not stated.

It would, perhaps, be more correct to assume that this manuscript version has been reproduced from an old copy of the text, including the book *kashf al-asrār ‘an ḥikam t-tuyūr wa l-azhār*, the book *Shajarat al-kawn*, and sermons and poems by Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī. The copyist who conveyed the manuscript to us was able to reproduce what distinguishes it from the original text. This version thus came in a patchwork and incomplete form! The title, which contains the part of the *Shajarat al-kawn*, is *ishāra fī mi’rāji n-nabi salla llahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. This reduction deluded the copyist into thinking that the manuscript was one complete

¹² *Ṭuruq al-Wasā’il wa Tamalluq al-Sā’il*, manuscript at Leiden University, Oosterse Handschriften, OR 709, fol. 90b.

¹³ Cf. the exact name of Ibn Ghānim and the name written on the Paris manuscript (2035, fol. 27a) and the complete name of his biography that I will mention later.

¹⁴ “كتاب شجرة الإيمان تأليف الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة الشيخ عز الدين عبد السلام بن أحمد بن غانم المقدسي قدس الله سره وروحه ونور ضريحه ونفعنا به والمسلمين آمين”

work, which has the same title – *kashf al-asrār ‘an hikam t-tuyūr wa l-azhār* – and that the part of the *Shajarat al-kawn*, as well as the poems and sermons by Ibn Ghānim, are part of the first book, which is a group of "references." Therefore, the copyist thought that it was a reference from the references to *kashf al-asrār* and guessed the title to be *ishāra fī mi'rāji n-nabi salla llahu alayhi wa sallam* on the basis of the topic, calling what followed it from the sermons and poems *ishārāt fī t-tawhīd*.

D. The fourth argument we find in a short note published by *Elias Sarkis* in his book *Mu'jam al-matbu'āt al-'Arabiya wa l-mu'arraba*¹⁵ (Glossary of Arab Literature); *Sarkis* says: "I saw a manuscript entitled *Shajarat al-kawn*, by Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī, similar to the work attributed to Muḥyī ad-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī printed in Bulāq."

We have thus solved the problem of the copying of manuscripts attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, and we are relatively sure of the preponderance of the copies attributed to Ibn Ghānim.

Discussing Catalogues Attributing Shajarat al-kawn to Ibn 'Arabī:

The oldest catalogues that attribute *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī are, first, *Fihrist al-Kutubkhāna al-khiddiwiya*,¹⁶ which was composed by Muhammad al-Biblawī and Aḥmad al-Mihi between 1305/1887 and 1309/1889. After that is *Dhayl kashf z-zunūn*¹⁷ by Baghdadi (d. 1920). Third is *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*¹⁸ by Carl Brockelmann (in 1943). *Histoire et Classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (R.G.) by Osman Yahya (in 1958- 1964) is fourth.¹⁹

A. With regards to the *Fihrist al-kutubkhāneh*, I believe that it was the reference that was adopted by the author of *Dhayl kashf z-zunūn*. The authors of the *fihrist al-Kutubkhāna* attributed *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī on the basis of two copies: the first was a manuscript from 1273 A.H.,²⁰ and the second was printed in Bulāq in 1292 A.H. This attribution here has previously been subject to criticism. With regard to the printed version, we do not need to criticize it, since it is a copy of unreliable origin, which are the manuscripts attributed to Ibn 'Arabī as criticized previously.

B. With regards to *Brockelmann*, his catalogue of Arabic manuscripts and books is almost legendary in the history of cataloging, because it is so detailed, accurate, and comprehensive. Nevertheless, Brockelmann and those following

¹⁵ In the margin of page 197.

¹⁶ Pt. II; p.89, d pt. I, t. VII; p.14.

¹⁷ Pt. II; p. 41.

¹⁸ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* G.I.443/12; 13

¹⁹ RG nr. 666 n Damascus. This is a Ph.D. from 1958 at the Sorbonne-Paris.

²⁰ Pt. I, t.VII; p.14.

him, such as Kurkis Awwād and others,²¹ thought from the start that Ibn 'Arabī's book *Shajarat al-wujūd wa al-baḥr al-mawrūd* was the same book as *Shajarat al-kawn*. So he referred to a version of *Shajarat al-kawn* printed in Bulāq in 1292 A.H., assuming that they were the one and same book. However, he corrected this error in the *supplement*,²² where he placed a question mark, undoubtedly because of its similarity to *Shajarat al-wujūd*, and then referred to the version found in *Dār al-kutub al-Misriya*.²³

C. Osman Yahya left no doubt in his *Histoire et Classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* either about the attribution of *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī and confirmed this, quoting from the manuscript copies, the historical value of which we have previously discussed. However, he acknowledges²⁴ that *Shajarat al-kawn* was not included in the old catalogues, especially those written by Ibn 'Arabī himself; such as *al-ijāza*, which he wrote in 632 A.H. for al-Mālik al-Muẓaffar, and the *Fihrist mu'allafāt ash-Sheikh al-Akbar*, which he composed at the request of his adept al-Qūnawī (d. 672 A.H.).

This, and the fact that Ibn 'Arabī did not mention *Shajarat al-kawn* in his encyclopedic work *al-futūḥāt al-makkiya*; his method in *al-futūḥāt*, when discussing a topic related to one of his books, is to abbreviate the discussion and then transmit in detail the book specified in that topic. Note that expressions like "*Kun=be*", "*al-insān al-kāmil=perfect man*" and "*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiya=the muḥammad-an truth*", which are basic concepts of the *treatise Shajarat al-kawn* appear frequently in *al-futūḥāt*.

Moreover, Ibn 'Arabī did not mention the book *Shajarat al-kawn* in his works that deal with subjects similar to those of *Shajarat al-kawn*; such as the book *In-shā' ad-dawā'ir*, *'Uqlat al-mustawfiz*, *at-tadbirāt al-ilāhiya* and *al-ittiḥād al-kawnī wa al-ishḥād al'aynī bimaḥdari ash-shajara al-insāniya wa ṭ-ṭuyūr al-arba'a ar-rūḥāniya*.²⁵ Therefore, it seems to me that the assumption that Osman Yahya made in the issue of the attribution of *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī is inaccurate, and its basis is unacceptable.

Comparing the Content and Format of Shajarat al-kawn to the Works of Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Ghānim:

I discussed the text of *Shajarat al-kawn*²⁶ with the great European specialist in Islamic mysticism and *Ibn Arabī* in particular, Michel Chodkiewicz, with respect

²¹ RG 667

²² Brockelmann, GAL SI. 74913. It had been printed in 1275, and had been previously criticized.

²³ Brockelmann, GAL, SI. 74913.

²⁴ RG n:666, p. 625

²⁵ See "Le livre de l'Arbre et des quatre Oiseaux d'Ibn 'Arabī; Risālat al-Ittiḥād al-Kawnī," transl. by D. Gril, in *Annales Islamologiques* XVII (1981): 67-68.

²⁶ This discussion took place at the end of 1989 at the Seuil publishing house in Paris when Michel Chodkiewicz was director there.

to its style, language, and intellectual content, and the relationship to the thought and style of both Ibn Ghānim and Ibn 'Arabī'. He confirmed to me his doubts concerning the attribution of this book to Ibn Arabī and based these doubts on linguistic differences in the analysis of the word *kun* between *Shajarat al-kawn* and *al-futūḥāt al-makkiya*.²⁷ In the *Shajarat al-kawn* it is composed of two characters, i.e. *al-kāf wa n-nūn* (as where the inner meaning was interpreted as follows): "So when Adam entered the School of instruction and was taught all the names,²⁸ he looked at the similitude of (*kun*), seeing what He who brings into being had purposed should be brought into being and saw that what was being taught by the *K* of (*kun*) was the *K* of treasure (*kanziyya*): 'I was a hidden Treasure; I was unknown but I wanted to be known...', and he saw the secret of the *N*, that it was the *N* of 'Yea, verily' (*anāniyya*), 'Verily I am Allah. No god save Me'" (*innanī anā LLĀH, la ilāha illā anā*) (Qur'an 20:14).²⁹

And he says in *Shajarat al-kawn* as well: "So he [Iblis = diabolos] used to look at the similitude of (*kun*) to see in its similitude the *k* of his own unbelief (*kufr*), so that he exalted himself, "refused and became proud" (Qur'an 2:253). Likewise, from the essence of the *N* the *N* of the unrecognized (*nakirah*) and the *N* of the recognized appeared."³⁰

Ibn 'Arabī interpreted it linguistically and philosophically in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiya*, quite contrary to the interpretation of the former. He divided it first into three characters; *al-kāf*, *al-wāw*, and *an-nūn*. He says, for example, in *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiya*: "the first word that was composed was the word 'be' (= *kun*); it is composed of three letters: *Kāf*, *wāw*, and *nūn* [*K*, *W* and *N*]."³¹

He says elsewhere in *al-futūḥāt*: "The exterior of the image of (*kun*) is comprised of two letters, *K* and *N*, and as the exoteric world was made, is comprised of two sides: the first is exoteric (*ẓāhir*), and the second is esoteric (*bāṭin*). The *nūn* corresponds to *ẓāhir* and *kāf* corresponds to the *bāṭin* ... whereas the mystery of this word is the letter *wāw* between *kāf* and *nūn*."³²

He says in a third place in *al-futūḥāt*, quoting a poem

Like signs, if you set up its image,
Like the signs of the female and the male,
But he (God) who placed the whole creature
on the reality of itself (= *KUN*) in the world of images,
The (*W*), without closing the syllable (*N*), would have been shown

²⁷ See Ibn Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 2, pp. 301, 312.

²⁸ A reference to sūra 2:31: "And He taught Adam all the names"

²⁹ Jeffrey "Ibn Arabī's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 65.

³⁰ Jeffrey "Ibn Arabī's Shajarat al-Kawn," pp. 65-66.

³¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 3 (Place: Dar Sadir; n.d.), p. 90.

³² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 2, p. 331.

Visibly, as if it was walking by destiny.³³

Ibn 'Arabī comments on this poem as follows:

the expression of the Qur'an, in connection with the creation of the things from the word oneself (= *KUN*), used two letters, like the first two assumptions. However what occurs after oneself (= *KUN*) is the synthesis, these two letters are open. But the third, which is the bond between the two, is removed because of the closing of the syllables *wāw* and *nūn*. Thus, just as nothing of the *qalam* (penis) is revealed in the sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. The semen is ejaculated into the vagina mysteriously, because it is a secret (= *sirr*). Elsewhere, marriage is referred to in the Arabic language as a secret (= *as-sirr*): God said: "but do not make a promise (of a contract) with them (women) in secrecy (*walākin la tuwā 'idūhunna sirran...*) (Qur'an 2:235). It is the same at the time of ejaculation, they stop moving, in a state of penetration or where the *qalam* (penis) disappears, like the disappearance of the *wāw* in (*KUN*), as a consequence of the interaction of the two letters (the *kāf* and the *nūn*).³⁴

From these texts we can conclude that it is contradictory to assume that the person who analyses the meaning of (*kun*) ("be") in *Shajarat al-kawn* is the same as the one who analyses (*kun*) in *al-Futūḥāt*. There is a big difference between the linguistical and philosophical analysis and the esoteric one.

We can add to the above observations, perhaps, the remark of the renowned orientalist Denis Gril³⁵ on the difference in the symbolism of the "tree" in the treatise *Risālat al-ittiḥād al-kawnī* of Ibn 'Arabī, and in *Shajarat al-kawn*.³⁶ Despite their common theme, these treatises are very dissimilar, whereas we find a great similarity between the treatise *al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī* and Ibn 'Arabī's work *'Uqlatu l-mustawfiz*. Moreover, we find a clear explanation in the latter work of the talk of the four birds, as mentioned in the *al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī*.³⁷ Also, the artistic styles in the *al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī* and Ibn 'Arabī's treatise *'anqā' mughrib*³⁸ are very similar.

In contrast, Ibn Ghānim's literary style can be detected in the first reading of the *Shajarat al-kawn* treatise. My long experience of reading Ibn Ghānim's manuscripts and printed books since 1987 allows me to recognize his literary style, which is rhetorical for the most part. It is based primarily on rhetorical methods and the musical aspects of language, such as prosaic rhyme, wordplays, etc. which are the dominant characteristic styles in *Shajarat al-kawn*. In addition, we often find expressions in this book that are very similar in style or content to the ex-

³³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 2, p. 100.

³⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 2, pp. 300-01.

³⁵ See his long article, "Sources manuscrites de l'histoire du soufisme à Dār al-Kutub," *Annales Islamologiques* XXVIII (1994): 154.

³⁶ Denis Gril, "Le livre de l'Arbre et des quatre Oiseaux d'Ibn 'Arabī: *Risālat al-Ittiḥād al-Kawnī*," *Annales Islamologiques* XVII (1981): 67.

³⁷ Gril, "Le livre de l'Arbre et des quatre Oiseaux d'Ibn 'Arabī," pp. 67-68.

³⁸ Gril, "Le livre de l'Arbre et des quatre Oiseaux d'Ibn 'Arabī," p. 68.

pressions contained in other works by Ibn Ghānim, such as “*ifrād al-aḥad ‘an ifrād al-‘adad*,” “*Sharḥu ḥāl as-saḥāba wa al-awliyā*,” “*Ṭuruqu l-wasā’il wa tamalluqu s-sā’il*,” and others.” One can compare the following five texts:

1. In *Shajarat al-kawn* he says:

When Adam – upon whom be peace – was created, and the light of our Master Muḥammad – upon whom be Allah’s blessing and peace – shone forth on his forehead, the Angels approached and gave greeting to that Light of Muhammad. However, Adam could not see it, so he said: “Oh lord! I should love to look at the light of my child Muḥammad -upon whom be Allah’s blessing and peace – so please convey it to one of my members that I may see it.” So Allah conveyed it to the forefinger, which He then raised and said: “I testify that there is no deity save Allah, and that Muḥammad is the Apostle of Allah.” It is for this reason that the forefinger was called *al-musabbiḥa*. Adam said: “O Lord! Does any of this light remain in my loins?” He answered: “Yes,” [meaning that] it was the light of his Companions, who are Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali. The light of ‘Ali He set in his thumb, the light of Abu Bakr in his middle finger, the light of ‘Umar in his ring finger, and light of ‘Uthmān in his little finger.³⁹

1.1. And in the book *Ifrād al-aḥad ‘an ifrād al-‘adad* Ibn Ghānim writes:

When God, exalted be he, created Adam, peace be upon him, he put the light of Muhammad in him, peace and grace upon him. This light shone on Adam’s forehead and lit up to just below the throne. The Angels went before Adam to greet him in peace. Adam then wished to see the light of Muhammad, peace and grace upon him, as the angels saw it and claimed: ‘Oh my God! I would like to see the light of my child Muhammad, peace and grace upon him, Transfer it to one of my limbs.’ God moved it to put it on his forefinger. When Adam, peace be upon him, looked at the light of his child Muhammad, peace and grace upon him, on his forefinger, he raised it saying: ‘I testify that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is God’s Messenger.’ It is for this reason that the forefinger was called *al-musabbiḥa*, ‘that which glorifies.’ Adam said, ‘Lord! Will a trace of this light remain within me?’ God answered him: ‘Yes, the light of his four Companions, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali.’ Adam said, ‘Oh my lord! Transfer them to my body so that I can see them.’ He then put the four lights of the four Companions on to his four fingers.⁴⁰

2. He says in *Shajarat al-kawn*:

For people have gone far astray and erred concerning me, saying that I encompass One Who has no mode of being.

O Muḥammad! How could One whose essence has no boundaries, and whose attributes are beyond number, be said either to be separated from me or borne by me? If His name is the Merciful, and taking His seat one of His attributes and quali-

³⁹ Jeffrey, “Ibn Arabi’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*,” *Studia Islamica* XI (1960): 125.

⁴⁰ Ibn Ghānim, *Ifrād al-Aḥad ‘an Ifrād al-‘adad*, copy in the National Library of Paris (nr. 6882, f. 18a).

ties, and His attributes and qualities are connected with His essence, how could He be either attached to me or separated from me, seeing I am not from Him and He is not from me? O Muhammad, by His might (I swear), I am not near enough to Him to be in touch nor yet far enough away from Him to be separated. I do not have the ability to bear Him. Nor am I inclusive enough to encompass Him or provide a similitude for Him. Nay, indeed, it was He, in His mercy, Who brought me into existence, as a favour and a kindness. Were He to annihilate me that would be but kindness and justice on His part. O Muhammad, I am something borne by His power, formed by His wisdom, so how could it be true that the Bearer is borne? So do not believe that about which thou hast no knowledge. Truly, hearing and seeing and having a heart are all matters about which in His case there is much questioning.⁴¹

2.1. In one of his poems in *Ifrād al-aḥad`an ifrād al-`adad* Ibn Ghānim says:

Whoever believes by ignorance that the throne (of God) can support Him cheats and ventures in injustice and aggression.

The throne, the ground and the seat (*kursī*) are his creatures;

He has created them marvelously and magnificently.

The throne begs highest; in its remote the throne is always in its search in love with God.⁴²

It is remarkable that *Shajarat al-kawn* is not the only one of Ibn Ghānim's works that was attributed erroneously to Ibn `Arabī: the work *Hall ar-rumūz wa mafātīḥ al-kunūz* was also attributed to him, whereas it is certain that Ibn Ghānim wrote it. The same book is attributed to al-`Izz Ibn `Abd as-Salām as-Sulamī (d. 660 A.H.), in the edition of *Jaridat ul-islām* of 1899/1317, and in *al-Matb'a al-Yūsufiyya* called *Khulāsāt zubad at-tasawwuf*. Also attributed to Ibn `Arabī is the work by Ibn Ghānim known as *Kitāb taflīs iblīs* in the Cairo edition of 1277 A.H., under the title *al-Qawlu an-nafīs fī taflīs iblīs*.⁴³

It is worthwhile to point out here that there are other books attributed erroneously to Ibn `Arabī. Some researchers have managed to disclose these erroneous attributions, as Denis Gril did in his *tadkirat al-khawāss wa `aqīdat ahl al-ikhtisās*,⁴⁴ which was edited by him. Osman Yahya did not include this work in his list of doubtful attributions to Ibn `Arabī; this list – according to Osman Yahya – amounted to over one hundred and forty works.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* XI (1960): 154

⁴² Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," p. 154, and see my dissertation *Shi'r Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisi* (Fez: Fez University, 2003), poetry n. 292.

⁴³ See Osman Yahya (RG), n. 571. The editors who attributed these works to Ibn `Arabī did so following certain manuscripts that attribute the two treatises to him, as mentioned by Osman Yahya in the above text. See e.g. *Fihrist Al-Kizāna at-Taymūriyya*, pt. 3 (Cairo: Dār ul-Kutub, 1948), p. 201.

⁴⁴ *Annales Islamologiques* XX (1984): 337-39.

⁴⁵ Osman Yahya (RG), pt. 1, pp. 74-75, and Claude Addas, "A Propos du Dīwān al-Ma'ārif d'Ibn `Arabī," *Studia Islamica* (1995): 187.

If the authors of catalogues and researchers of manuscripts managed to attribute the work *Hall ar-rumūz wa mafātīḥ al-kunūz* and *kitāb taflīs iblīs* to their real author, ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī, depending on the numerous and ancient manuscripts that attributed them to Ibn Ghānim, the continuation of the wrong attribution of *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn ‘Arabī, is to be seen as the result of the scarcity of ancient manuscripts attributing this treatise to its real author.

Discussion of Studies and Translations of Shajarat al-kawn Attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī

This is the last remaining problem that has to be discussed. First, there is Arthur Jeffrey’s English translation and introduction, followed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Iranian scholar’s study, the Frenchwoman Claude Audebert’s study, and Maurice Gloton’s French translation, which includes lengthy comments.

A. As far as Claude-France Audebert is concerned, she did not make any attempt to ascertain the authenticity of the attribution of *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn ‘Arabī but relied completely on the examination of this treatise in the Cairo edition only. Nor did she make any scholarly study of this treatise. As she states in the introduction to the study “*Tarīqat tafkīr ibn ‘Arabī fī risālat Shajarat al-kawn*,” she said that it would be limited to the study of the formal literary aspect. She assumed that by doing so she would reach the inner meanings of the treatise and therefore Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts. Audebert starts by studying the visual acts in the treatise, such as “looking (*naẓara*),” “he saw (*ra’ā*),” “witnessed (*shāhada*),” etc., in order to arrive at her conclusion immediately: the importance of “vision” in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thinking. Audebert used Ibn ‘Arabī’s books to reinforce this conclusion.

While I do not disagree with Audebert on the importance of “vision” in Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy, this cannot be used as evidence – in our discussion – for the claim that *Shajarat al-kawn* was written by Ibn ‘Arabī. This is so because the importance of “vision” and “witnessing” is not specific to Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy; it is the public domain of all philosophers, mystics, prophets, and divine messengers. In the *Qur’an* we find the repeated attempts of *Ibrahim* to find the Creator while gazing at the universe (cf. verses 76-78 of *Sūrat al-An‘ām*).

Audebert is also quite wrong with respect to the denial of historical time in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thinking in relation to her quote from *Shajarat al-kawn*: “So when He calls on them to bear witness against themselves in the presence of His witnesses, He will say: ‘Am I not your Lord? and they will answer; Yea, verity’” (VII, 171-72).⁴⁶ She comments: “As the present, the past and the future of each of these stages are linked to each other in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thinking, so Adam is a contemporary to the Prophet Mohammed, and he is the representative of mankind, which will be called up on the Day of Resurrection.”⁴⁷ What is right here is that *al-ḥaqīqa al-*

⁴⁶ Jeffrey, “Ibn Arabi’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*,” *Studia Islamica* XI (1960): 114.

⁴⁷ Claude Audebert, “*Tarīqat Tafkīr ibn ‘Arabī fī Risālat Shajarat al-kawn*,” 70.

Muḥammadiya was a contemporary of Adam, as is stated in the relevant *ḥadith*: "I was a Prophet, when Adam was between water and earth."⁴⁸ That Adam is the representative of humankind that will be defended on the Day of Resurrection is not the correct interpretation of the following phrase of *Shajarat al-kawn*: "and where he was announced during the day of testimony: 'Am I not your Lord?'"⁴⁹ This appeal does not concern the Day of Resurrection but prehuman history, which is the empowering world about which God had said that he asked humankind(-to-be) if He was not their Lord, to which the reply from humankind(-to-be) was affirmative.⁵⁰

In general, we can note that Audebert uses the exegesis-projection method for analyzing texts, which is not a scientific method. Following that method, we could, for example, attribute *Shajarat al-kawn* to Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī and we could use any texts of ar-Rūmī's books to confirm this argument.

B. The study that Arthur Jeffrey presented in the introduction to his translation of *Shajarat al-kawn* is regarded as the most complete in-depth study that was done on this treatise. However, Jeffrey did not do any research to confirm the authenticity of the attribution of *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn 'Arabī. I will not discuss all the details of the study because it will take us far from the research in which we are engaged here. But I will examine some points where Jeffrey was engaged in the comparison between *Shajarat al-kawn* and other works by Ibn 'Arabī to ascertain if the contents match or are not compatible with the texts from Ibn 'Arabī's books to which Jeffrey refers.

From the outset, Jeffrey decided that the subject of *Shajarat al-kawn* was the *al-haqīqa al-muḥammadiya*. He then says that this *al-haqīqa* is the source of inner knowledge, which is the source of power by which everything came to be, referring to page 99 of the first part of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya* from the writings of Ibn 'Arabī to strengthen his argument. My comment is that the truth (*al-haqīqa*) to which Jeffrey refers – is not *al-haqīqa al-muḥammadiya* but the *al-haqīqa* of the divine names that influence everything in this world, and it is the first key.⁵¹

At another point⁵² Jeffrey refers to the fact that in *Shajarat al-kawn* Ibn 'Arabī was the only one to link the word "creature" (*kun*) with the *Shajarat al-kawn*. But Jeffrey did not refer to any of Ibn 'Arabī's other works. This proves that Ibn Ghānim is the real author of *Shajarat al-kawn* and that it was to him that the uniqueness of this idea belonged. If it did belong to Ibn 'Arabī, it would have appeared in his books, especially *Al-futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, since in the first part alone

⁴⁸ *Kuntu Nabīyyan wa Ādam bayna al-mā' wa al-Ṭīn*; see al-Qārī in *al-maṣnū' fī ma'rīfat al-ḥadīth al-mawdū'*, pp. 141, n. 233.

⁴⁹ "Ṭarīqat Tarkīb ibn 'Arabī fī Risālat Shajarat al-kawn," *al-Mu'allim al-'Arabī* 20/4 (1967): 70.

⁵⁰ See Qur'ān 7:172.

⁵¹ Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 52.

⁵² Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 53.

the words *kun*, *kawn*, and *al-kawn* were mentioned more than twenty-five times,⁵³ without the least reference to the link between *kun* and *Shajarat al-kawn* and its origin, which is the seed (*al-ḥabba*). Making the seed the word of creation, *kun*, does not appear in any book written by Ibn 'Arabī, as far as I know. The use that was made of the word (*kun*) in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* does not stray far from its true meaning except in one place, i.e. the following analogy: "He sows the seeds of guidance and success in the earth of the human souls. Then this earth produces according to what has been sown into it."⁵⁴

Thereafter Jeffrey talks about various similarities as mentioned in *Shajarat al-kawn* and tries to find its paradigm in *al-Futūḥāt*. He refers to pages 65 and 87 of Part I of the old edition of *al-Futūḥāt*, and to page 67 of *Uqlat al-mustawfiz*. But when I compared those texts, I found a major difference between them, since there is no relationship between the similarities in *Shajarat al-kawn*⁵⁵ and what Ibn 'Arabī talks about in *al-Futūḥāt*⁵⁶ concerning letters, numbers, and their secrets.

Jeffrey goes a long way to search for sources of the theory of numbers in the old religions and philosophies, concluding that the rules of arithmetical similarities resemble the teaching of the Manichees.⁵⁷ He goes through all the trouble of searching for sources of the ideas contained in the treatise only because he was aware of Ibn 'Arabī's vast intellect and the great knowledge of this mystic philosopher. If Jeffrey had known that the author of *Shajarat al-kawn* was Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī – the mystic who did not go beyond his people's knowledge and his own spiritual experiences – he would probably not have taken all that trouble. I think that there are a number of similarities between the *Shajarat al-kawn* and the thought of 'Izzī d-Dīn Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī, who excelled in this art, particularly in his work *Ifrād al-aḥad 'an ifrād al-'adad*.⁵⁸

Finally, I will mention Jeffrey's⁵⁹ recognition of the clear difference regarding content between the *Shajarat al-kawn* on the one hand and *Uqlat al-mustawfiz* and the *Inshā' ad-dawā'ir* by Ibn 'Arabī on the other.⁶⁰ Jeffrey's recognition here saves us from continuing the discussion any further. It furthermore strengthens our reassurance of attributing *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn Ghānim.

⁵³ See Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, chs. 92, 95, 162, 187, 285, 286, 309, 310, 326, 423, 440, 482, 487, 488, 490, 533, 537, 548, 551, 577, 633, 688.

⁵⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 8, p. 278.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 59-60.

⁵⁶ Cf. p. 123 of *Shajarat al-Kawn* ("Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn"), and pt. 1, pp. 65 and 78 from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. Dār ṣādir.

⁵⁷ Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 60.

⁵⁸ The handwritten copy in the National Library of Paris (no. 6882, f. 1-27b) is incomplete. A complete copy is found in Damascus, al-Zāhiriyya (nr. 4465). It contains many similarities concerning the numbers 1-10, tangible and non-tangible things, and religious phenomena.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey, "Ibn Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," *Studia Islamica* X (1959): 57, n. 3.

⁶⁰ This idea was confirmed by the two French researchers: Denis Gril in *Annales Islamologiques* XVII (1987): 67, and Maurice Gloton in his French translation, *L'arbre du monde*, p. 124.

C. Gloton paid some attention to the attribution of the work to Ibn 'Arabī in the introduction to his French translation of *Shajarat al-kawn*. He confirmed that it is not contained in *al-Ijāza* nor in the *Fihrist musannafāt Ibn 'Arabī*,⁶¹ but Osman Yahya's confirmation of its attribution to Ibn 'Arabī removed any doubts Gloton may have had concerning this attribution.⁶²

My remark concerning Gloton's introduction is that he has adopted the interpretative and synthetic methods used by the translator; he depends on the interpretation of the views contained in *Shajarat al-kawn* applied to the complete philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī. He follows this process without referring – except in a few cases – to Ibn 'Arabī's own texts. Some references in Gloton's introduction are often far from the point he wants to make.

For example, when he talks about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a pillar of the universe, he refers at the end to the content of *al-Futūḥāt*⁶³ and to what is stated in the chapter "Hood" of *Fusūs al-ḥikam*.⁶⁴ When I compare these two texts and that of *shajarat al-kawn*, it appears that their aims are very different and their subjects quite distinct. Since righteousness (*al-istiḳāma*) in *Shajarat al-kawn* is a divine order only for the prophet (peace be upon him) and those with him, we find, on the contrary, in *al-Futūḥāt* and *Fusūs al-ḥikam* that the discourse is focused on the universal righteousness (*al-istiḳāma al-kawniyya*) and legal righteousness (*al-istiḳāma sh-shar'iyya*). It is therefore an attempt to demonstrate the righteousness (*istiḳāmat*) of all people, with reference to either the legal or general aspect. Gloton follows the same method in commenting on the *Shajarat al-kawn*, which takes up almost half of the book. His method confuses the features of *Shajarat al-kawn* with the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī in his literary works and thereby spoils its characteristics and independence. We can, in this regard, simply refer to the comment by Gloton on the word *kun* to prove how this mixing *Shajarat al-kawn* with the philosophy of Muhyī d-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī took place. In this commentary Gloton talks about the letter *waw* that is concealed between the *kaf* and the *nun*, which completely contradicts the analysis of *Shajarat al-kawn* for the word *kun*, as stated previously. The adoption of texts other than the text that is being scrutinised requires considerable caution to avoid confusing the reader, as is the case here. This method does not allow the reader to recognize that the *Shajarat al-kawn* is a work that is attributed solely to Ibn 'Arabī but implies farfetched interpretations that are not expressed in the text.⁶⁵ In a follow-up article we will present the life story of Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī.

⁶¹ Gloton, *L'arbre du monde*, p. 12.

⁶² Gloton, *L'arbre du monde*, p. 12.

⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, pt. 1, p. 217.

⁶⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, pt. 1, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Mustafa Hilmi has written an article on *Shajarat al-Kawn* in *kunūz fī Rumūz, al-kitāb t-tidhkārī Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī fī al-dīkrā al-tāmina li Milādih* (Cairo, 1969), pp. 35-66, but this article has little depth and lacks analysis. For that reason I have not included it in my survey. Also Hossein Nasr has written an article on *Shajarat al-Kawn* in Iran, which I have not been able to find up to now.

